

Iowa Gender-Specific Services Task Force (GSSTF)
Talking Points

WHAT is the Gender-Specific Services Task Force?

- We are a group of Iowans seeking to assure that young women in the juvenile justice system receive equitable services. We are judges, juvenile court officers, Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) officials, service providers, educators, researchers, representatives of women's organizations, and other individuals who are interested in the healthy development of *all* adolescent girls.
- Formed in 1995 by the Iowa Juvenile Justice Advisory Council along with the Division of Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning (CJJP), we began looking at gender issues in the development and provision of services by Iowa's juvenile justice system. Soon after that, we applied for and received a federal Challenge Grant to fund the Task Force's efforts.

WHY a Gender-Specific Services Task Force?

- As part of the 1992 Reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDP), Congress recognized the failure of the Act to deal with gender bias in any meaningful way and required specific steps to be undertaken to confront this systemic issue.
- Until the last few years, there has been little research or literature in regard to girls and delinquency. Most treatment models developed for dealing with delinquents are models for boys. Like round pegs in square holes, girls had to fit into existing service resources that were not well equipped to meet their needs. One of the steps required states to analyze gender-specific services and develop a plan for providing needed gender-specific services for the prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency.

What are the 11 COMPONENTS of excellence in GENDER-SPECIFIC SERVICES?

- Provide emotional and physical safety.
- Be culturally appropriate.
- Be relationship-based.
- Provide positive female role models and mentors.
- Address the abuse in girls' lives.
- Be strength-based, not deficit-based.
- Address sexuality, including pregnancy and parenting.
- Provide equitable educational and vocational opportunities.
- Address the unique health needs of females, including nutritional concerns and regular physical exercise.
- Nurture the spiritual lives of participants.
- Involve individual members of girls' families.

What are the GOALS of the Task Force?

- We advocate the use of innovative gender-specific approaches in meeting the needs of the adolescent female population in Iowa's juvenile justice system.
- Gender-specific programs encourage healthy attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles, and promote social competence in girls. Key program elements and intervention strategies aim to help girls within the juvenile justice system (or any system) by addressing issues in the context of their relationships to their peers, family, school, and community.
- In collaboration with the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council, we funded two program evaluations in July 2001. The *Girls' Circle* is an after-school prevention program for girls ages 11-15 and *Foundation 2 Discoveries* is a day-treatment program for girls ages 14-17 who are involved with juvenile court. The expected outcomes will be reported in September 2002 identifying how gender-specific service components impact the juvenile females being served by gender-specific programs. These outcomes will be beneficial to the programs being evaluated, as the conclusions can guide future program development. The conclusions will also be used to guide statewide policy regarding services for juvenile females.

What are just some of the ACTIVITIES of the Task Force?

- Organize *Whispers and Screams*, an annual statewide conference for girl-serving professionals or *anyone* interested in equitable services for girls. Now in its sixth year, this conference draws over 200 participants from around the state.
- Develop and maintain a speaker's bureau of Task Force members willing to give presentations and workshops on the gender-specific philosophy, the efforts of the Task Force, or their area of expertise.
- Provide regional professional trainings and technical assistance on the gender-specific services philosophy to girl-serving programs across the state.
- Send information on the gender-specific services philosophy to all community planning groups across the state and country.
- As Task Force members, we influence the community planning process to address the unique needs of girls by joining our local planning efforts across the state.
- Publish *The Girl Connection*, a free quarterly insert for girl-serving agencies' newsletters or other information distribution efforts. *The Girl Connection* is also available on our web site!